

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2007

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question no: PIAPH 01

Division/Agency: Product Integrity Animal & Plant Health

Topic: Testing for exotic diseases in the marine environment

Hansard page: 86-87 (14/02/07)

Senator O'Brien asked:

Senator O'Brien—What testing has the Australian government done to assess whether exotic diseases have been transferred into the marine environment?

Mr Cahill—You have probably reached the limit of my technical knowledge, so I might invite one of my colleagues

Mr Yuile—It is more likely that it has been at a state level in terms of their responsibilities for waterways.

Mr Cahill—That is really a matter for the Product Integrity, Animal Plant and Health Division.

Chair—It is the same question. There is no

Mr Cahill—We can take it on notice

Senator O'Brien —So has there been any testing of wild stocks here in Australia to determine whether white spot or any other virus has become established in the wild?

Dr Martin—My understanding is that there has been some surveillance done for white spot, but we can get further information for you from the product integrity area.

Senator O'Brien —I would like to find out when it was most recently done.

Dr Martin—The work that I am aware of was done, I think, back in about 2000.

Senator O'Brien —I note the government introduced a testing regime for white-spot virus back in 2001. Can we be provided with the results of the tests on imported prawns since that time? Is there some information that you can provide us?

Mr Yuile—I think I have taken that on notice.

Senator O'Brien —You have taken that on notice already.

Mr Yuile—That is what I understood you were asking earlier. So the outcome of the testing regime in terms of white-spot virus?

Senator O'Brien —Yes

Answer:

Testing of Australian wild stock – Australian Government

A national survey of wild crustacean populations was conducted during 2001 to test for the presence of White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV). After testing of samples from 3,051 crustaceans collected from 64 locations throughout Australia, WSSV was not confirmed in any sample. The results of this survey, combined with the absence of WSSV in a survey of farmed crustaceans conducted in 2000, the reported absence of clinical white spot disease in Australia, and the historical absence of WSSV from Australia, allowed the conclusion that WSSV is not present in Australian waters.

In conjunction with this national survey for WSSV, a smaller national survey for the exotic yellowhead virus (YHV) of prawns was also conducted. After testing of samples from 1,077 crustaceans, from approximately 30 locations throughout Australia, YHV was not confirmed in any sample. The results of this survey,

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combined with the reported absence of clinical yellowhead disease in Australia, and the historical absence of YHV from Australia, allowed the conclusion that YHV is not present in Australian waters.

Testing of Australian wild stock – general

Australia's states and territories have responsibility for the management of aquatic animal diseases within their jurisdiction. This responsibility includes surveillance for diseases (whether exotic or already known to exist in Australia). The states and territories report regularly to the Australian Government on their status for diseases on Australia's National List of Reportable Diseases of Aquatic Animals. This list currently includes ten diseases of prawns, including white spot disease (due to WSSV) and yellowhead disease (due to YHV). To date, there have been no reports of these diseases in Australian animals.

Australia's on-going surveillance for aquatic animal diseases provides continued confidence that Australia remains free from WSSV and YHV.

Testing of imported prawns

Australia, through the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service, (AQIS) implemented interim conditions on imports of prawns and prawn products in 2001. These conditions include the testing of certain categories of raw prawn imports for WSSV. Between April 2003 and January 2007, 573 batches of prawn imports have been tested for WSSV with 458 batches (80 %) returning a negative result. Batches testing positive are re-exported, destroyed, or further processed to address the quarantine risks, under AQIS supervision.